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May 1967 No. 38

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN TECHNICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

(Two Interpretations of the 1966 World Conference on Church and Society)

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CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS IN A
CHANGING WORLD
JOHN C. BENNETT
RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT IN A REVOLUTIONARY AGE
ECONOMIC GROWTH IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE
MAN IN COMMUNITY
Edited by EGBERT de VRIES

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Note to Readers:

The debate on the meaning of the 1966 World Conference on Church and Society continues, with the focus especially on the theological issues raised in the meeting.

Two interpretations of the meeting are presented here and others will be published in succeeding issues of BACKGROUND INFORMATION. The first is by Prof. Charles C. West, Professor of Christian Ethics, Princeton Theological Seminary, (U.S.A.) and the second is by Prof. Arthur Rich, Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Zurich.

Prof. West's statement was originally delivered as an address to the annual meeting of the American Society of Christian Ethics, Washington, D.C., January 21, 1967. Prof. Rich's paper on "Revolution as a Theological Problem", was one of three reports on the Geneva conference presented to the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Swiss Church Federation on November 24, 1966. The original text in German appeared in the Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz.

Comments from readers on either of these essays are cordially welcomed and should be addressed to the Department on Church and Society, World Council of Churches, 150 route de Ferney, Geneva, Switzerland.

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In addition to the publications on the World Conference mentioned on the opposite page, we call the attention of readers to:

1. The Official Report of the World Conference on Church and Society published by the World Council of Churches. 232 pages $1.50 or 5.80 S.Fr. Contains the reports of the sections and working groups, the Message of the Conference and a 40 page introduction on the work of the Conference.

2. Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of our Time by Bishop J. Brooke Mosley, vice-chairman of the Conference. 141 pages 25 cents US or 1.-- S.Fr per copy. A lively account of the Conference with suggestions for study and action.

TECHNOLOGISTS AND REVOLUTIONARIES

by

Charles C. West

The World Conference on Church and Society in Geneva, 1966, commends itself to study and reflection for a number of reasons. It was a Christian town meeting of extraordinary diversity. Probably never in history have so many different kinds of people gathered in one place to consider the affairs of the Church and the world. Ethnic diversity was impressive to begin with. No one race or culture was able to set the tone of proceedings, and if English language predominated over the four other official tongues of the meeting it was only as a vehicle of the sharpest debates and strongest criticism of the lands which use it as a native tongue. Professional variety was also remarkable. It was a rare church meeting in which theology was not the basic medium of discourse, where men of politics, science, industry, law and scholarship in many fields tried to share their languages, their faith, and their moral concern with one another. It was a meeting where youth and age confronted each other over a deeper generation gap than ever before.

But still more basically, the Geneva Conference was important because a confrontation took place there which has been two centuries in preparation. It was a confrontation not so much between different answers to the problems of our age as between basically different experiences of where reality lies and what its questions are. It was a confrontation between those for whom the frontier lies in the conquest of nature for the transformation of human life, and those for whom the issue is conflict between man and man, alienation and the achievement of humanity against the all-too-human demons of human power and greed. In slogan words it was the confrontation between the technologists and the revolutionaries, which had been so hopelessly confused by the sloganeers of the "Triple Revolution", between the traditions of economics and the traditions of politics, and between the apostles of continuity and those of conscious historical break. It was the confrontation of two humanisms, both of which had grown out of the soil of Christendom, taken nurture from rediscovered Greek philosophy, and lost contact with theology as a context for their faith and method and were now trying to reestablish some relation to the Christian faith. It was the meeting of two radically different conceptions of knowledge and relation, of subject and object, and hence of two different methods of thinking and acting.

Theology was also present at Geneva. But it was in the background. There was much it could have said, out of its own tradition, but it said little. For the task of the theologian in such a context is neither to force a translation of either universe of discourse into its own terms, nor to provide a Christian apologia, a mental church steeple, for one humanism or the other. It is rather to probe the human situation to which these different experiences give expression, so as to bring to light the dimensions and directions of that situation which are given it by that revealed mystery and that mysterious revelation whom Jews and Christians call God. The dialogue at Geneva, like the probing and acting of so much humanism today, was not between closed systems of theory and practice, thanks to a combination of Christian humility and disillusioning experience. It was at once open and engaged. The task of theology is to cultivate this tension and render it fruitful.

Humanism A: Man the Technologist

"What is new about our age?" asked the Harvard professor Emmanuel Mesthene on the very first evening. Not, he answered, the prominence of science and technology in itself. Not the rate of change. But rather that "we are the first age who can aspire to be free of the tyranny of physical nature that has plagued man from the beginning". Hitherto there has always been a limit to human aspirations, a frustration to human self-expression. This limit, identified with the eternal order of the universe, has been called nature and its structure the natural law. The problem of philosophy and of human life has always been to understand this object and to find the meaning of human life with relation to it. In its capacity to frustrate human dreams and desires and to destroy his joy and life it was known as fate or the Devil, or the flesh.

Today we have reached the point where this nature is subject to the planning and inventing capacities of man. "We can change it and shape it to suit our purposes." In Mesthene's own eloquent words:

> "We have the power and the will to probe and change physical nature, to control our own biology and that of the animals and plants in our environment, to modify our weather, to alter human personality, to reach the moon today and the rest of the heavens tomorrow, No longer are God, the human soul, or the mysteries of life improper objects of inquiry... We are convinced again, for the first time since the Greeks, of the essential intelligibility of the universe." (1)

This, for the speaker, was an exhilarating prospect. "Our technical prowess literally bursts with the promises of new freedom, enhanced human dignity, and unfettered aspiration". The process of enlarging our power over nature, of creating new choices and possibilities, even to the point of planning and remaking human nature, is the process of becoming more human. It can also mean becoming religious in a higher way, for God reveals himself as "the eternal possibility", the highest good of which man discovers more and more as he brings forth new possibilities from the universe himself. Recognizing the dangers that beset this adventure and the loss of older, more familiar values therefore, Mesthene challenged his audience to "recover the nerve" of the ancient Greeks and to explore and master the secrets of a basically intelligible nature for the greater power and freedom of man.

Robert Theobald, the economist turned prophet, was far less sanguine.(2) The expansion of man's control over nature means disaster in the midst of abundance unless human reason, reinforced by the moral influence of the churches, finds a way to replace the present chaotic selfishness of individual and national interest with new cooperative social goals and structures. Technological power means nuclear energy in a world where there are as yet no social means of solving national conflicts without war. It means the control of disease and reduction of deaths before we have agreed upon the limitation of births. It means the radical replacement of men by cybernated equipment in the production process with no provision for the economic security of the dispossessed and no reward of other socially valuable forms of creative labour. It means a growing gap between the rich and the poor without a system of

(1) "Technology and Religion", lecture at Geneva, June 1966. Pub. in Theology Today January 1967, P. 481 ff.

(2) Cf. "New Possibilities in Modern Technology" in Dennis Munby (ed.) Economic Growth in World Perspective, World Conference on Church and Society Preparatory Volumes, vol. III, Chapter 7. Comments here reported are from Theobald's comments on Mesthene, Geneva Conference.

income redistribution or of developing non-industrial lands. It means the manipulation of man himself - mentally through control of information and influence media, and biologically through drugs etc. - before man has set the social goals and controls for his own freedom and development. Theobald, in his books as well as in the forum of this conference, pleads for "a religious ethic" which will eliminate war, which will bend the selfishness of men and nations to the task of bringing abundance and freedom to all, and which will reinforce men's capacity to listen to and learn from each other, even at cost to themselves.

Is such a call to reason and religion in the midst of modern technology possible? From within the process, as its own rationale, says Jacques Ellul, no technology ("the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity" (3)) is a blind causal process, a system of means which has become an end in itself, of ambiguous character. It can be described, as the author does in The Technological Society, with sociological objectivity. It generates its own morality, the morality of the proper use of whatever is produced. It remolds human beings to its ends. Its progress is "completely ambivalent". It solves some human problems, and creates new ones. At each new stage the ambiguity of human nature expresses itself as the power stakes are raised and the game becomes more dangerous. Within such a system there can be no answer to the question of the end of meaning of human life.

What Mesthene celebrated, therefore, as the liberation of man Ellul describes as his enslavement. It would be better for societies that are not yet technological to avoid this development if they can, and rejoice in the freedom and culture they still enjoy. It is the task of those caught in the system however, especially the Christians, to seek to influence it from without, to formulate the "desirable" rather than the "foreseeable". Technology must be confronted with a reality outside itself, which does not depend on the inner rationality of its science for validity. For Ellul as a Christian this reality is that of the coming Kingdom of God according to which he is called to live and judge in dynamic polemical tension with the closed system of this world, thus creating new possibilities in the world and new space for human freedom. In The Technological Society he likens the stance to that of a physician in an epidemic or a physicist exposed to radioactivity:

> "The mind may remain cool and lucid, and the method objective, but there is inevitably a profound tension of the whole being".

For a Christian it is the tension of hope which is not derived from immanent analysis.

The spectrum is broad and the differences profound among these three men. Yet all of them, even Ellul as an analyst of society, belong within the tradition of one form of humanism. Mesthene traces it to Aristotle's concept of the entelecheia of the rational man. But it is rather the neo-classical confidence of Enlightenment man that speaks through his thought. The intelligibility of the universe meant something basically different to Aristotle than to the dynamic humanism

(3) The Technological Society (A. A. Knopf, New York, 1964), p. xxv

post Christi natum. The "nerve" of the ancient Greeks was based on confidence in an objective rational structure of the cosmos and all being, in which man may come to participate by the full development of his reason and the redirection of his passions. Modern technological man's "recovery of nerve" may draw exhilaration from this vision of the human mind embracing the universe. But the character of what he knows and the purpose of his knowing is basically different. His is a controlling, inventing knowledge. He no longer knows a cosmos or an unmoved Mover as a limit to his action and object of his contemplation. Physical reality, the universe, offers him only such resistance as excites him to greater activity, like an infinitely resourceful and submissive woman who helps a man only to forget that there are any limits on him at all.

Within this intelligibility the problems arise however which bedevil technological man. Mesthene's critics did not leave his exhilaration undisturbed. But their criticism came from within the same circle of presuppositions which this humanism shares. First, the assumption of a detached rational subject, capable of delivering reliable information about the object of investigation quite apart from its other involvement with that object. Not only Mesthene but also Theobald operates on this assumption in his appeal to economic reason, and even Ellul makes it the basis of his "factual" analysis even of the enslavement of men's minds.

Second, the assumption of a dualism between fact and value, between the method of science and the method of ethics, between that which is true about reality and that which it is good to do. For Mesthene all possibilities are open, and the Good is a kind of Divine inspiration. For Theobald man stands with Pelagius before choices of good and evil, asking whether the rational can possibly have the power of future reality in it. For Ellul the relation of the kingdom which judges this world to the world itself, of the "desirable" to the "foreseeable", remains problematic.

Third, the assumption that evil is located in the irrationality of man, in his failure to appreciate the harmonies of being. In the last analysis we have in each of these men a curious suspension of historical in favour of ontological categories, of the vitally human in favour of the eternally rationa. This is clearest in Mesthene who rejoices as his 18th century predecessors did that the irrational, for him demonic, objectivity of external power is surrendering to man's planning and inventing reason. But Ellul's analysis has the same effect. The autonomous irrationality of technology itself stands over against man - the rational analyst, man with his memory of a past age when it was still possible to be culturally human, and man with his determination against all history, to live by the coming kingdom of God. Theobald comes closest to escape from this with his emphasis on dialogue as a "profoundly wrenching experience as one tests each one of one's beliefs against the beliefs of others". He alone of the technological humanists was profoundly disturbed by the gulf between his own reason and that of representatives of the economically underdeveloped (even in the language the bias shows through) world, and asked how technologists might learn to listen. The problem of Theobald however was the problem of the great majority of western experts at the conference. Despite a profound desire to understand and sympathize with their opponents they were caught in the absoluteness of their own rationality. Unlike Immanuel Kant, they were far less certain of the reality of the practical reason than of the pure, and their exhortations partook therefore of a humanist's wishful thinking.

Humanism B: Man the Revolutionary

This humanism of the technologically developed, scientifically oriented western European and North American society confronted another humanism at Geneva which it lacked the categories to understand. The idea of social revolution is no stranger to ecumenical conferences. The basic missionary dynamic of the ecumenical movement has been a seedbed of revolutionary motivation as we will see more fully further on. But nowhere in World Council of Churches history has this revolutionary theme been so vigorously and thoroughly articulated as here. The issue was not between a Marxist and a "western" view of society, but basically between those who have prosperity, stability and power in some degree - that band of nations which circles the globe in the Northern Hemisphere, including the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, with a few countries elsewhere - versus the races and nations, including the classes in these developed nations, that are basically poor and powerless.

For these revolutionary humanists, not the confrontation of man with nature, but the conflict of man with man is basic. "Our basic demand", said the Nigerian lawyer, Bola Ige, "is for a share of the power now concentrated in the hands of a minority of mankind". This is first of all a political question; and only subject to politics, an economic and a technological question. Rational theories of economic development, aid and trade concessions from the technologically advanced always carry with them the power-interests and the ideological bias of the wealthy and powerful nations from which they come. They constitute an elaborate mechanism for allowing small changes on the surface of society - the absorption of a few of the intellectual elite for instance, into the ruling structure - in order to prevent any basic change at all in the control of wealth and power.

The Brazilian Catholic Professor Candido Mendes de Almeida documented this process massively with relation to Brazil and Latin America. Rapid economic development - the expansion of capital and intensification of industry for example - has not been accompanied by the shifts in political power which would place decisions in the hands of broader sections of the people. International capitalism, rather than an indigenous middle class, to say nothing of local trade unionism, has set the tone. The result has been the enthronement of a permanent bureaucratic class in economic and political control. The state has become the main economic agent supporting the interests of this class, not those of national development as a whole.

In those exceptional cases, such as Eduardo Frei of Chile in the nationalization of the copper mines, where the state has genuinely tried to intervene in the general interest, it has found itself caught between the economic logic of the enterprise in itself, controlled as it is by minority and foreign interests, and the demands of its own supporters for radical action. In most cases the common people remain permanently outside of the industrial economy, or on the edge of it, working at bare subsistence wages. The impoverished countryside provides a nearly endless supply of workers on these terms.

Such a society stagnates and decays while it talks the language of evolutionary technological and economic development with its democratic political accoutrements. The market economy is maintained in theory but does not operate in practice because subsidies and state controls socialize the losses. The myth of traditional society emerging into the modern world covers over the brute fact that the society is

determined economically by the world markets and local oligarchs which undermines the controlling and valuing influence of tradition. The forms of democratic elections fail to offer real alternatives. The labour movement, the intelligentsia and the Church are all subverted by a combination of economic control and lack of hope.

This pessimistic analysis shares much of the mood of Jacques Ellul, but with a basic difference. It is not the success of the demon technology which is condemned, not nature (allied with human nature) rising up to stifle man, but one structure of human power with its ideological orchestration, exploiting and destroying the humanity of masses of the poor. The basic experience is that of estrangement from this system of power, rejection of it, and the determination - which is not a moral exhortation but a basic posture of human existence - to revolt against it, overthrow it, and to become free human beings in the process of this revolt.

> "The revolution our people desire," said Bola Ige, "is one that will completely knock out all existing suffocating constitutions, systems and the powers that keep them going... "

He said it was necessary, to enable the poor peoples of the world to establish their own destiny, to wrest power from their exploiters.

Between this humanism and technological humanism there takes place, as there took place in Geneva, a continuous tragi-comedy of misunderstanding. It rests on a different view of the basis and function of thought itself. The technological humanist assumes the rationality of the thinking subject and the objectivity of scientific knowledge. The revolutionary humanist assumes the ideological nature of both. Thought and forms of understanding are expressions for him of man's relation to his object, of his struggle for self-realization, and of his interests and power in conflict with other men. The roots of this understanding are not in the Enlightenment but in Hegel and Marx; but they do not depend today on the authority of either of these thinkers, or on acceptance of the rest of their systems. There can be no separation for this humanism, therefore, between theory and practice, between science and ethics. Ideology is an expression for truth in both areas at once. It is, in the words of the Uruguayan philosopher, Hiber Conteris, "the emergence on the plane of consciousness, under the form of representation, of a situation which until that moment had simply been lived." It is the form of understanding and analysis of a life situation, which illumines the form of action which that situation requires. It is analysis in terms of humanization. It is relative to the thinker but claims the kind of general validity that his human situation actually enjoys, and that it can achieve by interaction with other analysts who share the same situation and are acting to humanize it as well.

> "Therefore", says Conteris, "when we draw attention to the social dimension of an ideology we are recalling that it appears to us like a system of variable coherence which expresses, explains or justifies the attitudes of man in relation to the world in which he lives, and also as an incitement to act in this or that direction in accordance with a value judgment of society."

There is in this revolutionary humanism, a basic rejection of every hypostatization of society, of every ontological ideal or eternal harmony. Evil lies precisely in this form of detached rationality, in the status quo of thought or social structure that claims to be valid

in itself. Its intellectual instrument is the ideology of continuity, of evolution, which forces men estranged from society to reconcile themselves to that estrangement. The test of truth and goodness is its capacity to guide the poor and the powerless in their struggle for power and human fulfillment through change in the power relations of their world.

It has been widely reported that the Geneva Conference committed itself to the way of social revolution. This however is an impression based on the impact of some of the speeches, not on the reports which the sections and working groups hammered out. Rather, what occurred on the level of economic and political analysis was a serious attempt by the technological humanists to absorb the challenge of the revolutionaries into their own reason and consciences so that the recommendations would be in some degree reconciling and constructive. The report on economic development, a condensed compendium of closely reasoned insights stated flatly that "in some countries economic development may demand a profound revolutionary change in the structure of property, income, investment, expenditure, education, and political and administrative organization"(4) It recognized the special interests that hinder rational international action for world development, the disproportion of political and economic power, the danger or monopolistic markets, and the inevitable conflict between the profit motive and equitable distribution of the social product. It called for radical increases of non-military aid from developed nations, up to 2% of their Gross National Product, revision of trade and tariff policies to benefit developing nations and in the long run adoption of a world economic plan for the benefit of all. It called the churches to education and political action in the name of man's responsibility to God for the resources of the earth and for his neighbour. The framework of the report remained however within the autonomous rationalism of economic science as developed by experts of the industrial world and as it was so thoroughly taken apart by Professor Candido Mendes. Nowhere was an analysis made of the consequences of the probable actions of the developed nations, and especially of their private industry, nor of the responses that the poor nations might make to them. Nowhere was repentance expressed for the fact that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development had been a failure because neither Communist nor western nations were prepared to make the radical revisions of their economic policies necessary to meet the needs of the 75 third-world countries present, or that the gap in production growth and real income is growing month by month. Nowhere was the impotence of education and moral exhortation recognized and its implications for historical action faced.

The report on the nature and function of the state in a revolutionary age was in one sense more successful, precisely in its lack of success. It was a battleground on which, for the edification of posterity, no attempt was made to cover up basic disagreements with a compromise statement. There was agreement for example that technological development had produced new concentrations of power within the state, and given the state new and more complex tasks, but disagreement on the degree to which the state should be the basic planning and controlling organ of society. There was agreement on a flexible but conserving

(4) World Conference on Church and Society: Official Report (World Council of Churches, Geneva 1967), Section I.

role for law in society, but disagreement on a whole range of questions concerning the change of law or violent resistance to it in revolutionary situations. There was a positive development of Christian responsibility for participation in nation-building under varying circumstances many of which involve compromises with democracy and other ambiguous choices, but also a carefully weighed statement of the Christian's responsibility for resistance, non-violent if possible but violent if necessary and if all the dangers are considered, against unjust power.

The result in short, is still a general framework of technological humanist reason, but with evidence of a challenge which has not been absorbed, an incongruous reality recognized but not completely faced.(5)

Theological Technocrats and Theological Guerrillas

This title of course oversimplifies. The forces of theology were dispersed and probing at Geneva. If they fell roughly into the same two camps as the humanists they did not engage each other in debate in the same way. Rather the theologians tended to be tentative, suggestive, pointing toward a future statement of the human and social problem that will go beyond the present confrontation. Therein lay their weakness in the conference, and their creativity.

The process of secularization as a fact of modern life in the context of which the theological-ethical questions must be asked was widely taken for granted. It was assumed however as a process, a way of living and thinking, not as a world view; as secularization, not secularism. (6) In this sense the theologians were more sophisticated on the whole than the technological humanists. Secularization was posited also as a reality for human relations - to one another, to God and to the future - and therefore as a matter for theological ethics, not for religious philosophy. The abstract conceptual problem which bothers Bishop Robinson and Paul van Buren played almost no role. More serious matters of human life and hope were at stake. The inner problem of technological man and of revolutionary spirit was the inner problem of theology as well, and was accepted as such. There were, with apologies for the schematization, three basic ways in which this problem was attached.

1. A serious effort was made in one direction, to grasp the inner meaning of technological development with the conceptual tools of theology, to discern its origin and legitimation in Biblical revelation and its humanizing destiny in responsible Christian action in witnessing partnership with God. The prophet of this perspective was

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(5) Sections III and IV, on "Structures of International Cooperation", and on "Man in Community in Changing Societies" respectively, have not been dealt with here because they pose special problems. Section III was also a work of careful technological reason but in the special context of the precarious international nuclear balance. Section IV was permeated by sociological considerations where the problem of continuity and change was interwoven with concepts of community which require a separate theological analysis of their own.

(6) This distinction, growing out of ecumenical study and discussion of the subject (cf. The Student World, 1st Quarter 1963 & The Meaning of the Secular, a report of a Consultation of University Teachers at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey 1959) is developed in C. West - "Community: Christian and Secular" in de Vries (ed.) - Man in Community (Church and Society Conference Preparatory Volumes, Vol.IV,

unquestionably Harvey Cox. Its spirit is eloquently expressed in the closing words of his contribution to the preparatory volume:

> "The once terrifying forces of nature, the thunder clap and the lightning flash, no longer frighten modern man. He has tamed the wild panthers of the natural world and harnessed their energies for his own uses. But man himself is now the cause of terror. His machines and machine-like organizations can do more damage, or bring more health, than all the thunder and lightning of the aeons put together. But we know that the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not just the God of nature. He is also the Lord of history, the supreme sovereign of economic and political life. He is now demythologizing the structures of corporate human existence and bringing them under human control, just as he once conquered the natural forces... He holds in his hand, a future for this technological man far richer and more brilliant than anything we have yet imagined. (7)

A special working group of the conference on "Potentialities of the Contemporary Technological and Scientific Revolution" took up the theme under his chairmanship:

> "Christians believe God expects man to exercise dominion over the earth, to name the creatures and to cultivate the garden of the world. It is thus not accidental that modern science flowered first in a culture informed by the Bible's emphasis on the world as a field of man's responsibility." (8)

Christians must help demythologize science to be sure. It is not either a means of salvation or a demonic power. Technology is also not neutral. It belongs within a human political and ethical context where it must be mastered for the service of man. The emphasis here is on human stewardship of the gifts of God. "Man has a priestly function toward the whole of nature" declares the Working Group on "Theological Issues in Social Ethics". His dominion over it as God's creation, "is that of a deeper and transformer, not of a conqueror." God remains Lord both of nature and of man. Nature therefore is not an objective structure to be learned and manipulated but is part of the ongoing historical process in which man also is involved. "Knowledge is not only the possession of date, the development of skills and their use. It is a creative interaction between the known and the knower in which their relationship is in a continuous process of renewal of understanding and clarification of meaning."(9) The limits on man in relation to the physical world do not lie then in the amount of knowledge he is able to attain but in the relatedness, the historicity of that knowledge, and in the calling to use it according to the

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(6)/cont./ Association Press N.Y. 1966), P. 339ff. Chapter 20. Chapters 18 to 21 of this volume develop the theme from different angles, in contributions from A. Th. van Leeuwen, C. I. Itty, and Paul Verghese.

(7)"The Possibilities of the Christian in a World of Technology", in Economic Growth in World Perspective, D. Munby (ed.) (Vol. III of Church and Society Conference Preparatory Volumes, Association Press N.Y. 1966), Chapter 8.

(8)World Conference on Church and Society, Official Report (Geneva 1967) p.188.

(9)Ibid., p. 196-198.

creative purposes of God.

All of this is profoundly true, but a dimension has been left out or understressed which leaves it exposed to the charge of theological technocracy. There are great theological antecedents for this perspective but in each case they have been one-sidedly used. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his Letters from Prison spoke of God not on the borders and weaknesses of human knowledge and power but at its centre and in its strengths. But Bonhoeffer was clear that just this affirmation of life and of the good is what it means to watch with Christ in Gethsemane, and to accept death and new life at his hands. Friedrich Gogarten (Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit) was the first to speak of secularization as a process of responsible search for power and use of knowledge which lives in hope of its completion but always recognizes its provisionality. But Gogarten's model for this posture is Martin Luther's and the Apostle Paul's understanding of man justified by grace alone, accepted by God as a responsible partner in the very act of being judged and forgiven for the idolatrous pretensions in his own striving. Karl Barth opens the way in his Dogmatics for a joyful positive assertion of all human creativity, but he does so aa an extension of the work of the redeeming Christ in whose light all secular knowledge is and remains phenomenological. Arend van Leeuwen (Christianity in World History, Scribners 1966) finds the mission of the Church today in the calling to rediscover in the modern world-wide dynamic of a technocratic age the impact of the Gospel on world history. But he understands this as a missionary confrontation between that Gospel and the movements it has spawned but which have been distorted into inhumanity by human forces.

The weakness of the theological technocrats, in short, is that they have tried to solve the problems of technological humanism with a doctrine of creation of which reconciliation, atonement, is a mere continutation. They have effectively countered the idea of a detached rational subject with a doctrine of the relatedness of all knowledge. They have abolished the dualism of fact and value and with it the a-morality of technology. They have even opened the way for a dynamic openness in defining what is human - by dialogue with God and other men rather than by the planning reason. But in all these insights they have left out the key to the process - "metanoiete, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand". "Christian life," Archpriest Vitaly Borovoy reminded the Conference, "begins in crisis; it also continues in crisis. Repentance is not a single act but a permanent state. The power of sin is not overcome at one go; it keeps on demanding new efforts, new renunciations." It is in the crisis of confrontation with the Redeemer, that man understands the dynamic of Creation in a way that is not simply self-confirming.

2. There was a second group of theologians who understood this from long experience with their discipline, and who sought to supply a controlling and corrective structure of theological concepts for the guidance of social change. Several structures were offered, but by far the most influential was the idea of The Responsible Society, presented by Heinz-Dietrich Wendland and Roger Mehl, and powerfully seconded by W. A. Visser 't Hooft in his opening remarks.(10) The concept has a

(10)Two other structures suggested in the preparatory material but not given much consideration in the Conference itself were a) the two-realms ethic of traditional Lutheranism, expounded by William Lazareth in J. C. Bennett (ed.) Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World (Church and Society Conference Preparatory Vol. I, Association Press NY, 1966), Chapter 6; and the natural law ethic set forth by N. H. Söe op. cit. Chapter 16 and criticised by Joseph Fletcher, op. cit. Chapter 17. The Geneva Conference as a whole was, in fact, a vivid demonstration of the irrelevance to secular decision and action of much of the traditional debate in theological ethics.

strong ecumenical tradition since it was coined by J. H. Oldham in preparation for the first assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948 and defined there as "one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it."(11) Roger Mehl calls it "an analogical transcription in the secular world of the brotherhood of the Gospel"(12), and suggests that it operates as a flexible model or pattern of that humanization which is the work of Christ in this world in the light of the coming kingdom of God. It is of course not an absolute, but a guide for constructure action in obedience to the call of the Redeemer. In Wendland's words it "indicates a decent, humane society with democratic institutions, whose norms are freedom, justice, humanity and peace.(13) Freedom implies partnership among all groups without institutionalized inequalities. Responsibility implies an experimental search for the common welfare, not affluence or power as such, by persons and groups who cooperate with and let themselves be limited by their neighbors. Responsible society can be also a revolutionary concept, Wendland maintains. It calls for continual reform in accordance with a new vision of social order - not just according to some piecemeal pragmatism,- which will embody freedom, humanity and justice more adequately than the present system. Christians will reject the use of violence and military power to achieve this social change, and strive to make it unnecessary. They will reject the utopianism of the absolute revolutionaries and recognize that "genuine revolution is always related to real history and introduced into history a new epoch, a new kind of social order".

In short, recognizing that the world-transforming power of the kingdom of God is a dynamic that ever exceeds and corrects human achievements, it is the duty of Christians nevertheless to offer the revolutionaries and the technologists, along with the traditionalists and all others, a flexible but concrete social purpose and an ethical imperative to attain it. In the words of Roger Mehl to the Conference, somewhat less radical than Wendland, but in the same spirit:

> "How, today, do we judge the efforts of the revolutionaries and also the efforts of those who strive in the midst of chaos to restore a rational order? Precisely, we do <u>not</u> judge them. —— We say to them only, 'whether you are revolutionaries or restorers of order, whether you are, according to the circumstances of history alternatively revolutionaries and men of order, remember that you have to seek the welfare of man, the liberty, the dignity of man, his participation in the human enterprise, his responsibility in human development. Everything else is literature and romanticism."

On the whole the conference worked in this spirit. The theology of a responsible society came closest to being the theological working principle of chastened technologists trying to understand and give

(11) Report of Section III of the Amsterdam Assembly, in <u>The Church and the Disorder of Society</u>, Amsterdam Assembly Series Vol. III, p. 200. Cf. also J. H. Oldham, "The Responsible Society. Ibid. Chapter X.

(12) <u>Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World</u>, Chapter 2, p. 56.

(13) Cf. Wendland - "The Theology of the Responsible Society" in <u>Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World</u>. Chapter 7.

moral direction to a dangerously dynamic world. But for just this reason neither it nor any other theological structure of ethics was able to give leadership to the Conference as a whole. For Responsible Society theology was confronted with a choice. When up against the basic cleavage it tried to straddle. Either it would follow the way Visser 't Hooft suggested toward responsible interaction with the various power forces and social political groups that are dividing the world today - but this would mean that the divisions of the world would be taken up into the Church and the conceptual model of responsible society would be sacrificed. Or it would project, as Wendland seemed to do, a picture of social order and a tactic of social change which Christians could approve - but then the Church would lose contact with the real forces that are moving history and the questions they raise, even theologically, to an intra-ecclesiastical social ideal.

3. The theologians of revolution at the Conference had no doubt which of these choices was the work of the Holy Spirit. Richard Shaull took up the call of Responsible Society theologian Roger Mehl to "take part in the great renewal of history" which the Lordship of Christ brings about and added:

> "A new generation of Christians, in many parts of the world, is taking this responsibility for revolution,'for the great renewal of history' seriously. When they do so, they find themselves in a strange, new - and sometimes shocking - world, and are part of a dynamic historical process. Within this situation some issues are seen quite differently than they appear to those outside, and the specific way in which they are raised changes on the road to the future. All of our encouraging theological reflections will not be of much help to the new revolutionary unless they are set within this concrete revolutionary situation and related to the questions arising there. Our first theological task is to take this step."(14)

What Bola Ige discovered for Africa and Candido Mendes for Latin America, Shaull found to be true also for the pattern of technological change in highly industrialized society. However much patterns of life may change, patterns of power tend only to be reinforced. Even in the United States, to work for humanization, for justice and freedom even in small ways forces one into ever more radical opposition to the system as a whole. Therefore "technology can contribute in the long run to human well being and fulfillment only as it is challenged by revolution."

The problem then is to help the victims of every system of power to develop a tactic of revolutionary action something like the flexible methods of guerrilla warfare, applied to the political and economic arena. Its aim will be continual changes in the power situation where and whenever they can be made. The tactic will be non-violent where possible, but not exclude violence. The whole will be sustained ba a disciplined faith and commitment to an open and hopeful future.

At this last point the Christian, says Shaull, has his basic ministry. He is called to live out in the form of his revolutionary

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(14)"The Revolutionary Challenge to Church and Theology", speech at World Conference on Church and Society. Pub. in Theology Today, January 1967. Cf. also "Revolutionary Change in Theological Perspective" Christian Social Ethics - Chapter 1.

involvement the judging and transfiguring power of Christ, the hope for an open future and for the triumph of weakness over power which his faith gives him. Theology must "keep going the difficult but not impossible running conversation between the full Biblical and theological tradition and the contemporary human situation, and discover how, in this context, to point concretely to signs of hope and grace, of meaning and fulfillment, in the midst of the ongoing struggle for the future of man.".

Shaull is clear that the revolution is not the absolute good, and that there may come a time when Christian witness will have to point more to the inhumanities it perpetrates than those it combats. But now is not this time, and the Christians of today, identified on the whole with a bourgeois society and an established order, are not the people to discern when and how to do it. Repentance then must precede theology. The Christian must place himself in the midst of the condition of exploitation, alienation, and hopelessness under the existing structure of power and make that condition his own. He must rediscover the form of his theology, and his calling as a Christian, in the midst of the positive ideological task and the struggle for a human future which this condition dictates. Gonzalo Castillo, out of Colombian experience, suggested that a dynamic ecumenism is arising in Latin America based on a revolutionary experience of the humanity of Christ as the way to the future, a total pro-existence opening the way to the world and breaking down religious and social barriers, leading to active sacrifice in the revolutionary cause.

> "It is a Christian ecumenism whose distinctive feature is efficacious love without discrimination, and having Jesus Christ for its example. It is the expression of human social solidarity based on the presence of Jesus Christ in all men, even in those who are seemingly dangerous and adverse, such as the prisoners and the outcast according to Matthew 25:31-46."(15)

This perspective is a profound expression of the metanoia of the Church of which Borovoy spoke. It does in fact, as Shaull has indicated, take the dynamic inherent in Responsible Society theology more seriously than it takes itself. Its negative expressions recognize the theological truth of the insights of revolutionary humanism - that all structures of thought are ideological, that theory is in order to practice, and that the redemption of man - bringing him forth from enslavement to evil into full humanity - is the reality of God's work which is prior to all structures of continuing harmony made by man. It shocked some of the most responsible and realistic technologists at the Conference. Dr. Max Kohnstamm accused Shaull of setting up a general theory of revolution which would result in the violent overthrow of all the patiently constructed rules of human behaviour by the establishment and deepening of which men learn to affirm one another's existence and welfare. From long experience in the European Economic Community Kohnstamm knew the threat of irresponsible violence as far greater than the injustice of the precarious social institutions man sets up to limit and control it for good. He and Shaull had a common premise in the realism of Reinhold Niebuhr that, in a sinful world, power must be coerced by power until such a balance emerges as will allow a rough and dynamic justice to be done. But the failure of

(15) Cf. "The Challenge of the Latin American Revolution" in Christian Social Ethics, Chapter 11.

communication between them indicates the problem. Kohnstamm was unable to see the very technology of social order as a form of compromise among the powerful, a "peace of this world" in Augstine's terms which appears to the poor, in this case most of the "third world", as a structure directed against them who have not the power to make their influence felt. Shaull was unable to place Kohnstamm within the context of God's reality which would show him the form of repentance and reconciliation for his situation.

Finally this perspective is not a theology for a revolutionary situation, not even a theologia viatorum. It does not illuminate for revolutionary man his relation to the future God is preparing him for as distinct from the future which is the counter-image of his own negativity. It does not show technological man how the threat to his existence and hopes that revolution poses is a call to repentance and new life in God's covenant and promise. It poses rather for theology a fundamental question: how can Christians understand the judging and redeeming word of God for this world in such a way that this word will operate continually as news from outside our structures of self-justification, and therefore as judging and transforming power and promise for each and all?

An ambiguous, tentative start on this task was made at two points. First, in a theological understanding of social change. "In secular technology and revolution" reads the Working Group Report on Theological Issues in Social Ethics, "man in the context of faith differs fundamentally from man in a non-believing context, in his understanding of the power of God to whom he is responsible, the human sin with which he must reckon, and the vision of true humanity which he finds in Christ. "He is by this very token a part of the struggle in our time to achieve a responsible society of justice and peace among men, and to discern and realize relative meanings in history." This solidarity, created by difference which defines the witness of the Christian, expresses itself negatively in freedom from dependence on existing social powers and structures, an understanding of the calling of the Church to be the pilgrim people of God and thus "to be a continuing challenge to the securities of this world". Repentance, death to old securities, acceptance of the judgment on human sin that is expressed in the resistance and revolution of those who suffer from our prosperity and power, is, for the Christian, a response to God's calling and a reflection of his work.

This difference expresses itself positively in "the hope of the final victory of Christ over the powers of this age". Every struggle for justice and humanity stands for the Christian under the sign of this hope, whose present reality is the Resurrection and whose form is Christ and his relation to other men. "This transformation (of the world) is, of course, never a simple completion of human plans and desires. It always brings a new perspective and insight into human relations. The world faces judgment and destruction in the future as well as progress and development. But because the Messiah who is God and man has risen from the death to which perverted human power put him, Christians are called to work to transform human society at every point in the hope that God will use their work for good whether they succeed or fail."

This newness is God's renewal, different, Andre Dumas pointed out, from man's innovations. It has the quality of resurrection and fulfillment, of revealing the true meaning of what has gone before in the very process of negating man's rebellion which it had embodied.

It is the tragedy of most revolution that, crystallized around its own power and negation, it only perpetuates the old, in its successes no less than in its failures. The ambiguous use of an ideology and theology of revolution, used by representatives from some eastern European and other countries to justify what has become a conservative status quo, was a vivid illustration at the Conference. For the Christian, God's renewal is present reality working toward the future. "God brings forth the contingency of his newness precisely in the midst of consistent human habits. He does not preserve and maintain; he breaks through. He is called a living God, unlike dead idols or ideas, because he takes by surprise and reshapes the very things that idols neglect or confirm."

This renewal that is the true meaning of revolution, also means forgiveness and reconciliation. Here most sharply the Christian differs in his solidarity from both revolutionaries and technocrats. Reconciliation is utterly destructive of human continuities, of theories of progress, of the old self and the old society. But it leads also to the affirmation of the adversary, the oppressor, the enemy, in the purpose and hope God has for him. It is this style of revolutionary hope in the midst of social conflict, as its end and meaning, that Christians are called to spell out concretely.

Second, a start was made on a theological understanding of ideology and interaction with it. Before the Conference began a controversy was already raging about the secularization of human thought and life and the end of ideology. Its locus is the volume Man in Community, Vol IV of the preparatory series. The challenge of Hiber Conteris sharpened the issue. How does Christian faith in its theological expression interact with the positive task of ideology formation as Hiber Conteris has defined it? In one sense, the Working Group on Theological Issues in Social Ethics recognized, theology itself is an ideological process. "Christians' discernment of what is just and unjust, human and inhuman in the complexities of political and economic change is a discipline which aims not at a theoretical system of truth but at action in human society." The Christian must continually respond to what he understands to be the action of God in the world and proclaim it as such.

This involves theology itself in all the problems of ideology formation. For human thought and action are not God's, even though they may be faithful. Ideology always faces a crisis of confidence in itself when its validity is challenged by the analysis and experience of another group. Christians share in this dilemma and are not deterred by it from analyzing and acting. But the Christian has a resource that can help the ideologist. "Theology reflects not only action but interaction between God's revelation and man's ideological understanding of his own condition and desires". It is in the way they show themselves to be corrected by this relation while they act on their convictions that Christians can help all men to keep their ideo-logies in a condition open to correction and renewal from without.

These are indices of the direction of theological work. They constitute a challenge to theology to become more truly itself in relation to its object and to interpret, in a way which will witness to a reality beyond its concepts, the events of God's action and the form of His determination of historical events bringing forth the human future. Theology is invited to the task of human social analysis, at risk of ideologizing, more deeply than ever before, as the Church

is invited into a witnessing solidarity with the conflicting groups of human society who will then confront each other in the ecumenical movement. In this process theology is called to discern the form of a transforming and reconciling power that is not its own or the Church's, but which gives the Church its reason to live and to hope on behalf of the world.

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Revolution as a Theological Problem*

by

Arthur Rich, Zurich

1. Theology has hitherto given little thought to the question of revolution, and such thought as was given led in the main to its unconditional rejection. The well known dictum of Gottfried Menken: "All revolutions are contrary to the Kingdom of God" (Letters VII, pp.95 and 128) is typical; and not only of the Lutheran Church. The thinking of both the Roman and Greek Orthodox Churches was no different in the past. The only exceptions in fact were certain Calvinist denominations, without which there would have been niether the Cromwellian revolution nor the North American War of Independence of 1775. There are two reasons for this to us not any longer self-explanatory state of affairs, one extrinsic and the other intrinsic. The extrinsic reason is that the churches, including those that emerged at the Reformation, identified themselves with the traditional social and ruling order. The intrinsic reason, providing the justification for the extrinsic one, goes deeper. It is rooted in the experience of pre-revolutionary society, which was relatively stable. Although this may sound rather far-fetched, one might say that from the time immediately following the Neolithic Age up to the French Revolution, the basic structures of the social and political order (naturally only the basic structures, not their historical manifestations) scarcely changed in essentials. Determining factors were the professional and social class system on the one hand and the patriarchal-authoritarian form of government on the other. This stability favoured the idea that behind it are permanent norms, subject neither to time nor historical change and related to the Creation itself; to violate these norms would be tantamount to violating the Will of God. Of course, revolution was incompatible with the sovereignty of God in the view of these religious concepts, which equated - more or less without bias - the actual world situation with the Divine Order of creation or to the Divine power that sustains the world.

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*Report on the Conference on Church and Society (Geneva, July 1966) given at the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Swiss Church Federation on November 24th, 1966. (The original text in German appeared in the Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz).

2. Since that time these religious concepts have been challenged by the historical development of modern times. Finally they were discarded as untenable. About the middle of the 18th Century the technological-industrial revolution for the traditional methods of production started. It involved, too, a complete revolution in the economic foundations of the traditional social order. At the end of the same century, the first political revolution rises: the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, ideologically strongly influenced by the former, which started the process of democratization of modern times. And finally, the 19th Century initiated the social revolution, a process whose end cannot even yet be foreseen. These three forms of revolution are combined today in the turbulent process of discovery in the so-called "Third World", thus giving it manyfold aspects. Thus it expresses itself in the form of anti-colonialism, as well as anti-feudalism and anti-capitalism: any one of the three revolutionary aspects may predominate. All this expresses the fact that the "status of this world" is passing away; in other words, that the political, social and economic organizational structures from which we stem, together with their underlying ethical values which we consider Christian, are historical in character, which means now that they have a merely relative and transitory character. (This may include values hitherto interpreted by natural law or by a theology of creation or by biblical insights). Both from the point of view of religion and from the point of view of the history of thought, this is so unheard of that one can understand why theology and Church faced the situation helplessly for a long, indeed too long a time, and were in general capable only of a dogmatic and emotional negation of the revolutionary forces of modern times.

3. On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that as early as the turn of the century, a different view of revolution and the contemporary world began to arise in theology and Church. The historicity not only of the social patterns but also of Christian social teaching, began to become a serious theological question, and here one should mention, first of all, Ernst Troeltsch. And, furthermore, the question arises whether the living God is not perhaps at work in the modern revolutionary movement, despite its opposition to historical Christianity, itself so closely interwoven with the traditional ruling, social and economic structures. That was the new question raised by religious socialism, from Blumhardt through Kutter and Ragaz down to Wünsch and Tillich. The question was made possible (especially in the case of the first three) through the primacy of the eschatological standpoint and the adoption of the Biblical concept that the Kingdom of God was imminent. According to

the eschatological view, the relationship between the existing world and its own origin in creation and its final goal, is not one of convergence but of overt divergence, indeed of demoniacal antithesis; consequently the Divine NO to the daemonism of society can be heard in the revolutionary rejection of this sinful world. But this new questioning did not penetrate; up to now it has only touched the fringe of Church and theology.

4. Among the most significant and exciting events of the World Conference on Church and Society in Geneva was the fact that it did deal with this very theme of "revolution" as one of its main subjects of discussion, thus proclaiming that the revolutionary world of today presents Church and theology with a new task, which must be tackled in a positive way. Because it dealt with this theme, one may without exaggeration ascribe to this conference a position of rank in the history of the Church.

Undoubtedly there was a more obvious reason why "revolution" became one of the major topics in Geneva. The "Third World" played a prominent part in the World Conference on Church and Society. It is well known that this "Third World" (to use this not entirely unobjectionable phrase for the sake of simplicity) is in a specific sense a revolutionary world. One can hardly set foot in it without finding oneself in a revolutionary situation. In other words, there the question is no longer whether one wants revolution or not, but how and by whom it should be carried out. The Church itself can no longer ignore this difficult, indeed uneasy (if not odious because embarrassing) question, if it wants to play a responsible part in the world in which it has been placed. The younger representatives from the churches in the developing countries realise this most of all, Latin America's role being particularly marked. It is true that here everything is more question than answer. There was a large measure of agreement that the question of revolution must be taken seriously and no longer circumvented. But in the attempt to find an answer, a constructive answer, to this problem of revolution, and above all to grasp it theologically, there was considerable difference of opinion. I shall now try to deal briefly with this difficult question.

5. The first problem is to define the concept of revolution, and to distinguish it from evolution on the one hand and from reform on the other. On this point, Heinz Dietrich Wendland had something important to say in his notable address on "Church and Revolution". Wendland first speaks of the three main types of revolution - the political, the social and the total. The first two are partial in their effect, whereas the third is universal. In my view, it would be factually more correct, as well as clearer, to speak of scientific-technological, political and social revolutions and to understand total revolution/ as the simultaneous

occurrence of these partial revolutions. If this were done, then it would become clear why revolution in the developing countries has a distinct tendency to be total (a word that must not be confused with totalitarian); whereas in the developed, industrial countries the revolutionary tendency has a partial character - a social tendency in the West and a political one (revisionism) in the East. It appears that in the "Third World" everything that has happened gradually in the rest of the world, or that happens step by step, has more or less to be undertaken all at once.

Now evolution has this in common with revolution - that it changes the existing situation. But in each case, the change is accomplished in a different way. In revolution its progress is discontinuous and perceptible, in evolution continuous and imperceptible. It seems to me advisable to emphasize, rather more clearly than Wendland did, that revolutionary processes involve quick, radical changes that are intentionally planned by man; whereas evolution takes place slowly and without the use of militant means - and here "militant" must not be equated with "violent". Revolutions may be violent, and in history most of them have been so, but they can also take place without the use of physical force. One example is the very radical restructuring of English society after 1945 by the Labour Government under Clement Attlee.

Reform shares with revolution the circumstance that it too happens quickly and through active, often violent intervention. Its goal, however, as Wendland rightly showed, is partial change within a social order that is accepted in principle; whereas revolution aims at a basically new concept of society, even if it should take place step by step, or even comes to a standstill at a particular stage. Under the term revolution, therefore, must be understood all the technological, political and social changes intentionally planned by man and brought about through active involvement, and remain static once a new "image" of social order has been achieved.

The second problem concerns the possibility of revolution in the developed society. This question was taken up by André Philip in his significant paper on "The Revolutionary Changes in the Structure of European Political Life" (included in the second preparatory volume for the World Conference on Church and society*). This distinguished

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*Association Press, New York, 1966, pp. 115-129

French economist and prominent left-wing politician, (who certainly cannot be suspected of wanting to defend the status quo) shows in this chapter that abrupt, especially violent revolution is no longer possible in modern industrial society (although it contains "une situation révolutionnaire" - p. 39), for such an upheaval would have to destroy the entire system of technological production and result in the impoverishment of the masses. Accordingly, the problem of revolution in developed industrial societies assumes an entirely different aspect from that in the developing countries. In industrial societies, social changes can no longer be achieved in a revolutionary manner (in the classical sense of the term) as they are in the developing countries. That is what André Philip means when he speaks of the "end of revolution". He does not mean the end of the political and social structural changes in society itself; he means the end of spontaneous violent transformation of society in the style of revolutionaries of the past. This half-critical, half-sceptical view was misinterpreted as "anti-revolutionary" by some delegates from the developing countries who approve of revolution. However, André Philip's point of view shows that things can be seen and judged very differently and that a romantic concept of revolution is out of place. Even for a man like the American Richard Shaull, who is in close contact with socially-critical, radical Christians in South America, and is trying to work out a theology of revolution, this situation demonstrates the need to find a new "strategy of revolution", at any rate in the case of societies which are already technologically advanced ("The Revolutionary Challenge to Church and Theology", typed manuscript, page 3.).

The third problem is the question whether, and how, Christian participation in revolutionary changes of society can be justified. On this question there was widespread agreement that eschatological faith and revolutionary existence are of necessity related. This point was emphasized by the French theologian, Roger Mehl, ("The Basis of Christian Social Ethics", Preparatory Volume I, p.44), as well as by the German Heinz Dietrich Wendland (p. 135) and the American Richard Shaull (p. 23). Seen in the light of New Testament eschatology, the imminence of the Kingdom of God means not only that the future is transparent for all to see, but that it is already present. "The fact that the Dominion of Christ is already present breaks the injustice in the existing order and summons us to participate in the renewal of the world." Here (and this, in my view, is the decisive gain), revolutionary activity enters

the Christian's sphere of responsibility. Where, however, does his specific task lie? So far as the negative definition was concerned, again there was widespread agreement. The Christian should work for a revolution, said Shaull, quoting Wendland approvingly, but he should do so in a critical spirit, i.e. he should resist the temptation inherent in all revolutionary situations to regard revolution as an end in itself; and in this way expose its "latent idolatry". In other words, he should know, and proclaim as his theological responsibility, that no revolution can provide the total solution to what we need - the Kingdom of God. Thus, revolutionary intervention in historical and secular society always means intervening for something that is relative. This view ran like a red thread through most of the discussions. Within this "relative", however, one must take up a position. This brings us to the fourth and last context.

To start with: a very rough difference of opinion arose in this context, the subject of which was the positive responsibility of the Christian in the revolutionary situation. How does the Christian know what is positively asked of him in the revolutionary situation? Does he know it from a concept of ethics based on ultimate norms? Or does he know it from a situation-ethic that has no norms? Both points of view were advocated and they clashed sharply. However, the unmistakable winner, particularly among the theologians but also among the non-theologians from the developing countries, was the situation-ethical view, even if it was not called by that name. This phenomenon causes me some theological misgivings. On the one side I tend to the view that situation-ethics are right, in so far as God's Will is revealed to faith only in confrontation with a concrete situation. But is His Will revealed <u>out of</u> the concrete or revolutionary situation, or in relation <u>to</u> it? That is the question here.

Where revolutionary situation-ethics mean the former (i.e. <u>out of</u>) then they are theologically similar in form to the conservative social ethics. For both the Will of God becomes transparent in the process of history, being a suggested part of history itself: in the context of conservative social ethics through the statics of basic social structures; in revolutionary situation-ethics through the dynamics of contemporary revolutionary movement. In final analysis, both views regard God's concrete Will as identical with the so-called permanent necessities of history. We must take good care that theological social positivism

(which one hopes has been abandoned once and for all), is not replaced by a theological revolutionary positivism which accepts the revolutionary changes in history simply because they happen. If this were to happen, we should lose the required critical distance in relation to the revolutionary and dynamic events of our time. This would lead only to a revolutionistic instead of a conservative conformity; it is one of the great dangers of all Kairos-theology, to which many an advocate and epigone of early religious Socialism in the past has yielded.

In the light of this discussion, what is absolutely essential today, is a clarification of the relationship between divine commandment and revolution. Emil Brunner, in his day, examined the established "orders" in relation to God's commandment, in order to focus social ethics in concrete terms, and also to maintain the required distance from the traditional "theology of established order" (which has fallen prey to the status quo). Similarly revolutionary action today, (regardless of whether it takes place rapidly or slowly, violently or non-violently) must be examined in its relation to God's Commandment, as revealed in the Scriptures in relation to (and not from) the concrete situation; this situation must furthermore be studied with all means at the disposal of empirical research. Admittedly, (and in this connection one must pay attention to Karl Barth), God's Commandment will have to be constitutive, God's Commandment as the substance of the Gospel, which authorizes the believer amid a revolutionary world to lead a revolutionary life whose aim is change. The Christian will be with the world when God's Commandment permits, but against the world when God's Commandment so requires, as a manifestation of the fundamentally revolutionary trend in the world, whose true meaning is the coming of the reign of God. Such examination, if carried out properly, must lead to a concrete interpretation of God's Commandment in correlation with the revolutionary situation of the industrial age. Only in this way can we break down the false alternative between legalistic ethics based on fixed norms and situation-ethics, which have no norms at all. Only thus can a way be found on which social institutions will not only change, but will be transformed in a spirit of Christian responsibility. Precisely this, however, is the great theological and socio-ethical task presented to us by the Geneva Conference on Church and Society.